

Children develop through a transition of being primarily oral communicators to being able to engage in literate communication. Oral language underpins the language skills of literacy.

Children read and write by building an extra level onto thinking, talking and listening. If the oral language is not there, or is imperfect, there is a poor base on which to build written language. Many of the difficulties students may experience in developing the skills of literate communication are often related to existing speech and language difficulties.

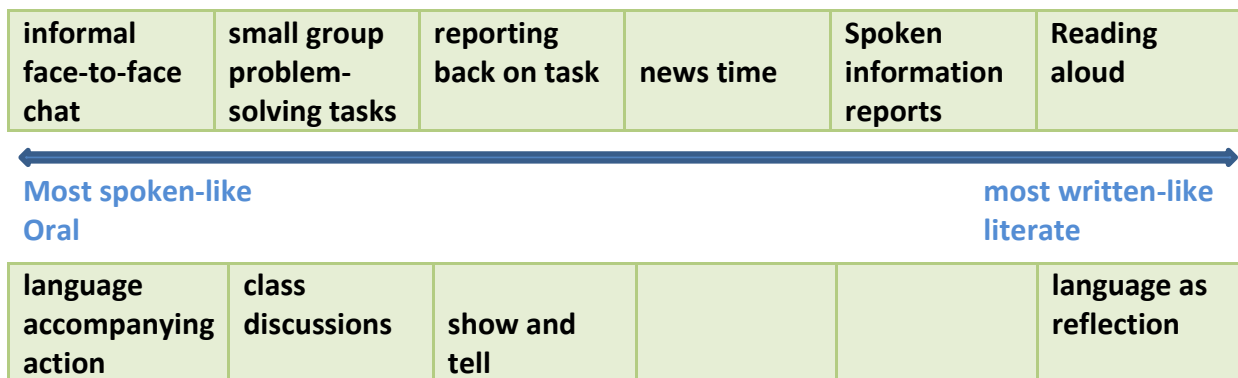


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Oral to literate language continuum

There are clear differences between spoken and written language. Writing is usually highly organised, explicit and concise. Speaking in comparison can appear disorganised and circular.

Spoken and written language occurs along a continuum known as the spoken to written or ‘oral to literate continuum’.



Language at the oral, most spoken-like end of the continuum involves:

- The ‘here and now’
- Meaning conveyed through intonation and body language
- Many clauses strung together using connectives
- Relies on the listener’s understanding of the situation
- Is used for exploring or processing ideas and information

Language at the literate, most written-like end of the continuum involves:

- Discussion of events outside of the ‘here and now’
- More meaning or concepts packed into a fewer number of words
- Language that is more precise and concise
- Referents being named so that the reader understands the message

- Used for recording ideas, feelings or information

The ability to move from using oral language to using literate language allows children to effectively read and write about unfamiliar or imaginative topics. It is vital to develop a child's oral language skills initially so that they can both comprehend and construct text based communication.

The 'oral to literate continuum' provides a useful frame work for planning spoken language tasks in all subjects. Students need to be able to use language effectively right across the continuum. The oral and the literate are used interchangeably as students prepare for writing texts and discuss and understand what they are reading.

References:

Talking to learn, Pauline Jones (ed). PETA 1996

Focus on literacy: Talking and listening. NSW Department of Education and Training 2003, Professional Support and Curriculum Development